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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to train staff to improve (over an 8-month period) the literacy and reading skills of 60 delinquent adolescent boys residing in a juvenile correction facility. Most of the boys residing at the training school had poor school histories characterized by reading achievement scores several grade levels below their peers and little motivation to improve their skills. A review of the literature indicated that traditional classroom methods of reading instruction would not provide a solution to this problem, and therefore a whole language approach to reading was implemented during non-school hours in the transitional residential cottage. The cottage was flooded with reading material suitable to the needs of interests of this population. Results indicated that the youths' attitudes towards reading improved as measured by the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading. Narrative and ethnographic data suggested substantial practical significance associated with the improved attitudes scores. Collaterally, disciplinary reports were reduced substantially. (Two figures are included; 1 appendix (the Whole Language Experience Skill Checklist) and 18 references are attached.) (PRA)

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Improving the Literacy Skills of Delinquent Adolescents Through Cottage-Based Whole Language Activities and Experiences

by

Vincent J. Carbone

Cluster XXX

A Practicum (II) Report Presented to the
Ed. D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1991

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Vincent J. Carbone under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

June 9, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

Wm. W. Anderson
William Anderson, Ed.D,
Adviser

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The writer would like to acknowledge the support and helpful ideas of the Phoenix Cottage manager, James Vensel. His diligent effort and his committment to excellence make him an asset to the Eckerd Youth Development Center and the youngsters he serves.

This practicum is dedicated to the memory of my father, John J. Carbone, whose years of sacrifice and patience have made it possible for me to pursue my personal and professional goals.

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ABSTRACT

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This practicum was designed to improve the literacy and reading skills of delinquent adolescent boys residing in a training school. Most of the boys residing at the training school had poor school histories characterized by reading achievement scores several grade levels below their peers and little motivation to improve their skills.

After a review of the literature related to this topic it was decided that traditional classroom methods of reading instruction would not provide a solution to this problem. A whole language approach to reading was implemented during non-school hours in the transitional residential cottage. The cottage was "flooded" with reading material suitable to the needs and interests of this population.

Analysis of the data demonstrated that the youth's attitudes towards reading had been improved as measured by the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading. Narrative and ethnographic data suggested substantial practical significance associated with the improved attitudes scores. Collaterally disciplinary reports were reduced substantially.

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5/10/91 Vincent J. Carbone

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The setting is a secure juvenile correctional facility serving approximately 150 seriously delinquent males. The institution is spread over approximatley 40 acres of land in a rural community of approximately 15,000 residents. The physical security for the facility is provided by a 15 foot cyclone fence surrounding the perimeter of the grounds. The integrity of the fence line is monitored through an electronic "perim-alert" warning system which sounds an alarm whenever the fence is moved. Within the confines of the fence perimeter youngsters move under supervision with few constraints and without the need for locked doors within buildings. All movement into and out of the compound is monitored 24 hours per day and only occurs by permission of the gate operators

There are approximately 25 buildings on the grounds of the facility. The functions of these buildings generally fall into one of

three categories; educational, residential or administrative office space. The residential buildings are cottages housing 20 youngster each. Within these buildings there is a dormitory, shower room and recreation room. There are nine cottages within the fence perimeter and two transition cottages outside the fence. One cottage within the fence is a disciplinary cottage serving the extremely aggressive youngsters for a brief time out.

The approximately 150 youngsters residing at the facility range in age from 13 to 18 years of age. Their county of residences' are all within the southern one-half of the state where the facility is located. A similar program serves the northern half of the state. All youths are court ordered to the facility following a judicial hearing. They are sent to the institution to receive educational and rehabilitative services after a long history of adjudicated serious criminal offenses. Offenses range from numerous felonious property crimes to murder. Most youngsters remain at the facility for about seven months and then return to their home communities and usually rejoin one or both of their parents. During the first six months of their return to the community they

remain under the supervision of the institution's aftercare program

At the institution, services converge on the youngster from three major departments; Program, Education and Professional Services. Program is the largest department and is responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the youngsters and oversight of all rehabilitation services provided by other departments. The Education department is organized as a school and therefore is responsible for providing all school-like learning experiences from initial assessment to exit evaluations. Professional services helps to coordinate and provide for counseling and psychological services for all youngsters based upon identified needs. In addition, this department is responsible for the aftercare services. All three major departments must coordinate efforts if rehabilitation of youngsters is to be the outcome of the services. The most visible manifestation of the convergence of all three department's efforts is represented during the weekly Case Review Committee (CRC) meetings. At this meeting the representative from each department presents data regarding the evaluation or progress of an individual youngster. Almost all important decisions re: case management are made at the CRC.

Writer's Setting and Role

The writer served as the Program Director during the development but not implementation of the project and was therefore ultimately responsible for the supervision of all youngsters and for the planning and coordination of all rehabilitation and educational services while in that position. The Program Director's duties were "brokered" through three assistants who serve as program managers and who directly supervise the activities of the individual cottage managers. Within the program department the key staff are the direct care counselors, the cottage social workers and the cottage managers. The cottage managers are responsible for the supervision of all rehabilitation services and case management of each youngster. The social workers act as the "broker" of services among departments, case managers and the direct care provider of counseling services under the supervision of a cottage manager. The counselors are responsible for the daily supervision of the youngsters during all activities.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Most youngsters admitted to the institution had long histories of poor school attendance and even poorer achievement in the basic skills. Their school histories were marked by repeated failure and general frustration. They learned that school and the learning process in general is a boring and tedious process that they avoid at every opportunity. They perceive reading and writing instruction as just another class that they must endure. Consequently, they "go through the motions" in their literacy classes without developing an appreciation for the value of reading and communicating through the written word. Many of the youth have turned to crime and anti-social acts as a means of compensating for their inability to understand and function within the mainstream of society. Although the rehabilitation program at the institution provides specialized methods of education to overcome this very serious problem, most youths fail to take full advantage of the instruction provided. There

is very little evidence that the instructional programs encouraged the youngsters to become consumers of practical and recreational reading materials. There appeared to be little if any transfer of skills from the instructional setting to the everyday lives of the youngsters.

Upon release from the institution most youngsters return to their communities. These independent living environments to which they return hold little promise for encouraging reading and general literacy skills. If the youth are not equipped to handle the challenges of this situation with newly acquired literacy skills the likelihood of successful rehabilitation is greatly diminished. Their abilities to find and maintain gainful employment, learn new and complex jobs and benefit from services their communities can provide will be reduced by their limited abilities. It is factors such as these that will make it inviting to return to old and illegal habits of life support.

Most juvenile rehabilitation programs have focused their literacy efforts on improving student's scores on standardized tests of achievement. Although it may be possible to increase a low functioning student's reading achievement two to three grade levels

within a six month period there is little assurance that this change translates into practical value for the student. Without some measure of change in attitude and reading habits of the youth which transfer to his everyday life, the rehabilitative effect is probably lost. Prior to the implementation of this practicum, the institution's efforts were focused upon the more traditional methods of literacy programming which include standardized testing. Moreover, literacy experiences wre ordained as the exclusive dominion of the education program within the classrooms. Few, if any attempts, were made to complement the traditional school curriculum with literacy experiences within the residential living environments of the institution. There needed to be a re-defining of the mission of literacy building to include emphasis upon attitudes towards reading as opposed to just skill building. In addition, a partnership between the school and residential programs needed to exist. The cottage or residential setting could have served to support literacy skill-building as a practical and enjoyable experience. Within this supportive environment, the youth's attempts to acquire knowledge from the printed or written word would be encouraged and rewarded. Within this supportive

environment the direct care staff, counselors, would have the skills and motivation to encourage youth to acquire attitudes and skills which will transfer to other settings including their home communities. Within this environment the youth would develop an appreciation for literacy resulting in better attitudes toward written material, increased reading to acquire information and pleasure, a sampling of a wider variety of materials and more time spent sharing their new information with others.

Prior to implementation of this practium the residential living units provided little if any support for literacy actitivies and did little to encourage good attitudes towards reading. Precisely stated then, the problem was that youth entered the institution with poor reading skills, habits and negative attitudes towards reading as a useful method for acquiring practical and pleasurable information. Moreover, the rehabilitation program of the institution did not provide the components of a supportive environment which are associated with improving youngsters reading attitudes and skills.

Problem Documentation

Reading achievment for each youth was measured upon intake by the administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1990). The distribution of scores during the last six months prior to implementation indicated that about 60% of the youth read below the sixth grade level. In addition, a survey of the cottage staff indicated that the cottage did not contain any reading material other than school text books. Surveyed staff also indicated that youth were rarely observed reading at any time in the cottage and if they did read, they were not heard to discuss the material with another youth or staff. The Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading (Estes, 1971) was administerd to all 150 youth on the campus prior to implementation. An overall score of "5" indicates a very good attitude towards reading with a score of "1" indicating a very poor attitude. Analysis of the results showed scores ranging from "1" to "5" with a median score of about "3". This type of distribution of scores indicates that at least one-half of the youth report that they have either not formed a strong attitude in either direction towards reading or they have a poor to very poor attitude towards reading. Given the fact that it is rather easy to

slant one's responses in the socially desirable direction on the Estes Scale since there is strong face validity to the instrument, this writer would suspect that attitudes towards reading may be even poorer than the recent data suggest.

Causative Analysis

A positive attitude towards reading develops when students experience supportive environments, e.g. school and home, which encourage reading as a practical and enjoyable experience. In most cases, good attitudes develop because youth have been successful in their attempts to read, they have had the skill modeled for them and because reading eventually provides experiences which are meaningful and useful within everyday life. The school and home environments of many of the youth residing within this juvenile correctional institution have lacked the essential components necessary to develop high skill levels and good attitudes toward reading and literacy in general. Most of their school experiences have been negative and wrought with abject failure. Consequently, they have dropped out of school in the early middle school years which precluded opportunities for success. Moreover, their

communities and homes have failed to provide them with the valuable experiences that they missed in the school setting. At this point in their lives they lacked the foundation necessary to appreciate the value and enjoyment which comes from reading. They viewed reading as something that occurs only in school and only for the purpose of avoiding the disfavor of a teacher. Within the institution this attitude has been accidentally reinforced by the absence of literacy activities within the cottage setting. All attempts to encourage reading and writing skills occured within the school, in classrooms, and only during scheduled school hours.

The non-supportive environments the youth experienced prior to entering the institution and within the institution have also been characterized by a scarcity of reading materials. Any interest that a youth might have in reading something other than school textbooks was virtually eliminated because these materials were not available. The residential or cottage settings provided little opportunity for youth to develop their literacy skills in meaningful and valuable ways.

A causative factor which contributes heavily towards the poor reading attitudes of this population goes beyond the program issues

at the institution. The juvenile delinquency "culture" which is established by these youths discourages and openly punishes members who pursue reading. In the absence of strong positive adult role models, youths who attempt to pursue literacy activities are ostracized and admonished. These youth are considered weak and therefore not deserving of the group's recognition and support. This influence can be sufficiently strong to drive even the most literate members of the group to read in privacy only. This type of cultural "inertia" presents a major obstacle to institutional programming of literacy skill-building.

Finally, although many of the delinquent youth have developed the mechanical skills necessary to benefit from the printed word, they were not inclined to use this skill as a vehicle for acquiring knowledge and pleasure. Traditional methods of reading instruction, which have emphasized the formative aspects of the task as opposed to the functional, may have accidentally supported this limited approach to literacy. As a result, reading skills do not transfer to daily life activities where meaning and comprehension are the important issues.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Illiteracy in this country is unquestionably an overwhelming problem especially when you consider that about two-thirds of colleges and universities find it necessary to offer remedial reading and writing programs for in-coming students (Wellborn, 1982). Kozol (1980) concludes that incarcerated men and women, as a sub-set of the U.S. population, contains the greatest percentage of illiterate individuals. Coffey (1981) supports this contention with the fact that about 80 percent of offenders are school drop-outs with less than 10th grade educations and actually function far below their last grade attended. The National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NIJJDP,1977), through its Project READ (Reading Efficiency and Delinquency) has provided the most comprehensive assessment of the reading skills and attitudes of delinquent youth to date. A survey including 4,330 delinquent youth in 47 states and the District of Columbia, revealed that this population reads at the 4.5 grade level with over one-third of the population being functionally illiterate. A research report by Humphrey & Mersky (1979) conducted within the Massachusetts

Department of Corrections youthful offender programs corrorborated the findings of the NIJJDP report. They reported that youthful offender's are generally deficient in reading and that this deficiency is typically the result of poor comprehension skills. Moreover, they found that this population seems to be more undecided in their attitudes towards reading as opposed to ill-disposed. Finally, Winzer (1981) suggests that improving the reading ability of delinquent youth might not only be desirable but essential to their rehabilitation. She reports that rates of recidivism of juvenile offenders appear to be lower for youngsters whose reading skills have improved.

Helfeldt and Henk (1985), warn that rehabilitation programs which attempt to address this very important problem with the traditional methods used to instruct elementary school children functioning on the same levels may well fail with these students. They suggest that these students have had important life experiences as well as many bad experiences with school-based instructional methods and therefore are candidates for alternative methods of literacy preparation. Fader & McNeil (1968) in their seminal and distinguished work identified a similar problem in a

juvenile correctional institution for delinquent boys. They reported that traditional school-based methods of reading instruction along with authoritaritan methods of control within the residential programs were antithetical to the development of an environment supportive of literacy skills. They identified the problem of poor reading attitudes and motivation of this population to be associated with irrelevant instructional materials in the form of textbooks and methods which were heavily weighted towards classroom activities focused on mechanics as opposed to functional utility. When Fader and McNeil's (1968), conceptualization was used to assess the extent of this problem in juvenile institutions in 47 states and the District of Columbia in the form of Project READ, it was discovered that the problem was of national proportion.

Within recent months a comprehensive critique of reductionistic/ mechanistic instruction was present by Heshisius (1991). Heshisius has provided one of the most convincing arguments for the use of whole language instruction with near-adult delinquents. His position serves as the philosophical and epistemological basis for utilizing a fucntional language approach with delinquent youth. In hi article, Heshisius (1991) argued that

educators who ascribe to traditional instructional methods typically present information without consideration of the contextual, personal, functional and relevant variables related to the learner. He contends that measuring performance by counting the number or reductionistic objectives completed ignores the essence of learning for the individual and the functional value he or she ascribes to the information. Moreover, Heshusius (1991), contends that teachers of this ilk must impose their methods on rebelling students because the curriculum does not contain contextually relevant and functional information which contain intrinsically motivating elements. Under these circumstances students may sucuumb to the teacher's imposition of his/her values but the student gains little real-life and utilitarian information. Schooling for these students is a disjointed set of experiences which do not transfer to every day life experiences.

Church and Newman (1986), provide additional support for this contention by demonstrating through a whole language case study that learning, which is grounded in "real" purpose and meaning for the individual, is viewed as more than an instructional exercise and therefore motivates students to learn. Weaver (1988), has extended

the logic of this theme through an elegant, albeit esoteric, discussion of whole language instruction within the context of psycholinguistic theory. The timely publication by Heshusius (1991), provides substantial support for using functional methods of instruction for teaching literacy skills with adolescents.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the practicum was to improve the students' attitudes towards reading while increasing the frequency of reading and the variety of materials read. It was expected that students would develop an appreciation for the value of printed material beyond school-based assignments. It was also anticipated that the students would begin to recognize the benefits of reading related to solving everyday problems and as a pleasurable experience.

Behavioral Objectives

The goal as cited in the above section is a general statement of intent and expectations. The objectives listed below describe precisely how the situation would improve if the present problem was solved by the methods suggested within this practicum:

Objective:

WHEN: During two (2), one (1) hour
UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS: instructional sessions conducted by the writer
WHO: with cottage staff.
DO WHAT: the staff will learn to develop a supportive reading environment and to conduct nightly reading/discussion groups as an alternative to TV viewing
MINIMUM PERFORMANCE LEVEL: and will be considered adequately trained when they attain a 100 % score during a role play of the methods taught
HOW MEASURED: as measured by a checklist of skills taught during the instructional sessions.

Objective:

WHEN: Three (3) evenings per week for 45 minutes
WHO: the youth in Phoenix cottage
UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS: in the living room of the cottage
DO WHAT: will participate in a reading/discussion group facilitated by the cottage staff
MINIMUM PERFORMANCE LEVEL: and will therefoe improve

1. their attitude toward reading
2. the amount of time reading and or writing
3. the number or times they choose to read or write
4. decrease the number of disciplinary reports for misbehavior

HOW MEASURED: **as measured by:**

1. **an improved post-test score as compared to a pre-test score on the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Towards Reading.**
2. **weekly student and staff reports of time reading and writing**
3. **weekly student and staff reports of the number of occurrences of voluntary reading and writing**
4. **decrease in the number of disciplinary reports for the group after entering the discussion/reading groups.**

Measurement of Objectives

The measurement of the objectives for this practicum provided a systematic means of assessing improvements in the student's literacy skills and attitudes over an eight (8) month period of time. The first obejctive of the practicum was to teach the residential or cottage-based staff to develop an environment supportive of literacy and reading/writing in general. The Whole Language Experience Skill Checklist (Appendix A) describes the skills the staff acquired during two (2) one (1) hour instructional sessions this writer provided. The sessions was conducted in the cottage living room where the evening reading/discussions groups were held

with the students. This writer provided the staff with an overview of what the youth will accomplish and examples of phrases to direct students towards the newly acquired reading materials. In addition, the author modeled a nightly reading/discussion group with the staff acting as students and then asked each staff member to do the same. Each staff's performance was assessed using the Checklist in Appendix A, and the staff were considered adequately prepared when they receive a 100 percent performance rating.

The second objective related to improving the attitudes of the students to reading and actual changes in their reading and writing behavior. Each youngster who entered Phoenix cottage was administered the pre-test of the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading . Since all youngsters exited the institution through this cottage, each student was also administered the post-test just prior to release. The administration of the scale took about 20 minutes with each youth. Those youngsters who experienced difficulty in reading the scale were provided help in understanding each item and the rating values.

The scale consists of 20 items with 5 response values from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" with undecided as the middle

value. Each response has a numerical value associated with it ranging from "1" to "5". There are 12 negative items and eight (8) positive values. When scoring the instrument the positive items receive a value of "5" for "strongly agree" while the negative items receive a value of "1" for the same response. Consequently, the student's total score represents the summation of these values and therefore places a youth along the continuum of responses. The closer a score is to "100" the better the attitude of the student towards reading . This method of scoring lends itself to pre-post test analysis since changes in attitude following the reading/discussion groups can be assessed by subtracting the initial score from the exit score. Scores which show a positive difference indicate an improvement in attitude towards reading while negative scores indicate a worsening of attitudes toward reading.

A special log was placed at the counselor's station for recording all student's voluntary reading or writing behavior including time spent reading, discussions of material read, and other anecdotal reports related to literacy skill-building. In addition, a total of the number of disciplinary reports per month for Phoenix cottage for the six (6) months just prior to the practicum project was determined

and then tracked for each month of the practicum implementation phase. These data provide information related to collateral changes in student performance resulting from the practicum project.

Sixty (60) youth participated in this program at Phoenix cottage. Individual data were maintained on each youth's pre-post test on the Estes Scale to determine changes in attitudes. A bar graph depicting the average mean pre-test score and the average mean post-test score for all participants provided a sufficent graphic display for determining and analyzing improvements in the group's attitudes towards reading. The number of disciplinary reports, as a measure of collateral improvement, also lend themselves to quantitative analysis and graphic display for purposes of analysis. The number of disciplinary reports by month for the six months prior to the practicum project are displayed on a frequency polygon (line graph) along with the monthly totals during the implementation phase. The anecdotal reports of time spent reading, frequency of reading and discussions of materials read are analyzed in narrative or ethnographic form. Quantitative analysis of this information would probably obscure the meaning and significance of these important factors.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem addressed by this practicum involves youth entering the institution with poor reading skills, habits and negative attitudes towards reading as useful methods for acquiring practical and pleasurable information. Moreover, the rehabilitation program of the institution did not provide the components of a supportive environment which are associated with improving youngsters reading attitudes and skills. Fader and McNeil (1968), began with the assumption that incarcerated delinquent youth do not lack the intellectual capacity for reading but lack an enriched environment to support their desire for reading. According to these authors, the problem is motivation and not ability. Moreover, they assume that traditional methods of teaching youngsters the mechanics of reading through textbooks as opposed to the functions of reading through paperbacks, magazines and newspapers only contribute to this

problem. This notion has gained substantial support recently in the Heshusius' (1991), article regarding the philosophic and eptistemogolical basis for whole language instruction. Fader and McNeil (1968) ultimately found that their assumptions were correct when they first tested their hypotheses with a group of students incarcerated in a juvenile training school in Michigan. They found that they could improve the attitudes of students towards reading while increasing the frequency, time and variety of materials read by "saturating" the living environments of the youth with interesting and enjoyable reading materials. Moreover, when the staff of the institution provided a safe and comfortable environment for students to sample these materials and share information with others, the motivational problem was overcome. Due to the sucess of this initial project in Michigan, the American Correctional Association in cooperation with the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, (1977), funded a national project to disseminate this approach in the form of Project READ (Reading Efficiency and Delinquency). The annual report (NIJJDP, 1977) of th project described methods of "saturating" the institutions with paperback and other non-textbook type materials,

staff encouraging and guiding students to read for enjoyment and functional value and generally providing a literacy environment which was safe and accessible.

Nancie Atwell (1987), has added substantial knowledge to the body of literature regarding literacy training. She chronicled the experiences of an eighth grade teacher who discovered practical and valuable instructional methods for teaching reading through observing students engaged in learning. She suggests that establishing the classroom or any environment as a reading and writing workshop one can motivate adolescent students to read and learn beyond what are thought to be their capacities . Atwell (1987), provides additional support for focusing on methods which lead to a supportive environment for reading and writing and how students' somewhat natural tendencies toward reading can be guided and nutured through an enriched environment. She supports Fader and McNeil's (1968), assumptions and findings regarding motivating students through meaningful exercises as opposed to drill and practice instruction.

Fagan (1988), and Staab (1990), elaborate on this theme by suggesting that a teacher's activities should emphasize reading as a

means of acquiring useful, relevant and enjoyable information as opposed to emphasis upon the structural or mechanical aspects of reading, e.g. phonics. Smith (1990), has gone so far as to operationalize this theme into activites which he suggests make up the fabric of the supportive and functional environment. He contends that cooperative reading/discussion groups in which students read text, listen to others read and discuss the meaning of what has been read serve as the very foundation of a supportive environment. When journal writing and sharing is added to these methods a comprehensive "Whole Language" approach is established (Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores, 1987). Finally, Ecroyd and Wagner (1979), indicate that secondary students rarely have the opportunity to be read aloud to, however, this practice has much to offer this group especially as a motivational tool.

Description of Selected Solution

The literature, ostensibly, had much to offer this writer in choosing solutions strategies to overcome the literacy problems of delinquent adolescent youth within a correctional institution. Several studies and ideas cited above provided a menu of strategies

from which to choose. This writer decided that the theme of providing an enriched and supportive environment to improve the reading attitudes and skills of these students held the greatest promise for solving the problem. In specific terms this means that first, the Phoenix Cottage was enriched with a wide variety of reading material including magazines, newspapers, paperback books and informational pamphlets. All of these materials were freely available to the students and prominently displayed. To insure that the environment was managed in the most productive way, the staff received instruction and demonstrated the competencies necessary to guide students and to develop their interests and motivation. At least three (3) evenings a week for 45 minutes, as an alternative to TV viewing, the students and the staff conducted a reading/discussion group. During these groups the staff began by reading poetry or briefly from a novel as a continuing story. Students were encouraged to also read aloud from materials they found interesting. For example, it was conceivable that an article from Ebony Magazine about the 10 most powerful Black leaders in this country might well be of interest to the entire group. The facilitator of the group would interject comments designed to

encourage discussion about the information being shared. All staff and youth were requested to maintain a daily journal of information or ideas on the days happenings. They were asked to share the journal entries with the group or privately with individual staff of their choosing. The students were asked to increase the number of letters that they wrote to their families and to use the topics discussed in the reading groups as a way of sharing information with their families. The youth were encouraged to discuss current events read in the day's newspaper as a means of entering into a dialogue with their friends and relatives. The staff praised and encouraged youth who voluntarily engaged in reading and writing activities and recorded these occurrences in a specially prepared log to document changing attitudes and habits of the youth.

Report of Action Taken

The following is a list of the activities and their sequence within this practicum project:

1. Immediately upon approval of the proposal this writer conducted the two (2) one (1) hour instructional sessions with all Phoenix Cottage staff according to the procedures cited above. These

sessions were completed within one week.

2. During the first week the student's were administered the Estes Attitude Scale as a pre-test and the enriching reading materials were made available to the youth. The special log for recording anecdotal information was placed at the counselor's stations.

3. On the Sunday evening of the second week of implementation the first reading/discussion group was conducted. This group differed from all others in that it was an opportunity to explain to the youth the rules of the group and the intent to encourage them to read more often . Most of the content of this group was focused on introducing the youth to the materials which are now available and how they will be an important part of the discussions to be held each Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday evenings each week. The cottage manager provided the introduction to lend his support and encouragement for the staff and youth. Suggestions from the youth for ground-rules of the discussions groups were incorporated into subsequent meetings.

4. The cottage manager immediately began compiling Disciplinary Reports from the cottage as a method of assessment as cited above.

5. Beginning on Tuesday of this same week the group discussions were conducted by the direct care with the cottage manager

availabe for the first few meetings to insure successful implementation.

6. On an on-going basis throughout the practicum the cottage manager reviewed student and staff progress in completing all activities during the weekly cottage team meetings. He maintained frequent contact with this writer to review progress and the need for corrective actions. Data which serve as the measurement of the stated objectives were reviewed systematically during the contacts.

7. Throughout the eight (8) months of implementation this writer attended group sessions to observe and monitor quality. All cottage staff maintained a log of their personal readings to share with the groups.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENTATIONS

Results

The objectives of this practicum were to train staff to implement a whole language reading program in the residential cottage setting of a juvenile correctional facility with the intended benefits to be measured in terms of improved attitude toward reading, increased student reading, increased voluntary reading and a concommitant decrease in the number of disciplinary actions against students. This writer found that direct care non-educational staff were enthusiastic about implementing this program with the youngsters they supervise in the residential program. This enthusiasm translated quickly into developing the skills necessary to implement the program through the initial training sessions. The para-professional direct care staff quickly

met the competencies as listed on the Whole Language Experience Skill Checklist (Appendix A) during the training . The training procedures included instructions regarding the basic skills, modeling, role-playing and feedback on performance. The training session was conducted in the actual room where the staff conducted all subsequent group meetings with the youth to assist in transfer of the training. Several staff required additional individual work to develop some of the more sophisticated skills, e.g. maintaining lively discussions, however, following the two (2) training sessions all cottage staff were adequately prepared to begin the program by demonstrating their ability to meet each of the stated competencies during role-play situations. The cottage manager maintained close monitoring of staff performance throughout the implementation phase and used real-life situations to extend the training on a day to day basis.

Figure 1. provides a graphic display of the data in summary form. Each youth's pre and post-test composite scores on the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Towards Reading were maintained during the course of the practicum. Youth entering the cottage and prior to joining the reading/discussion groups were administered the scale

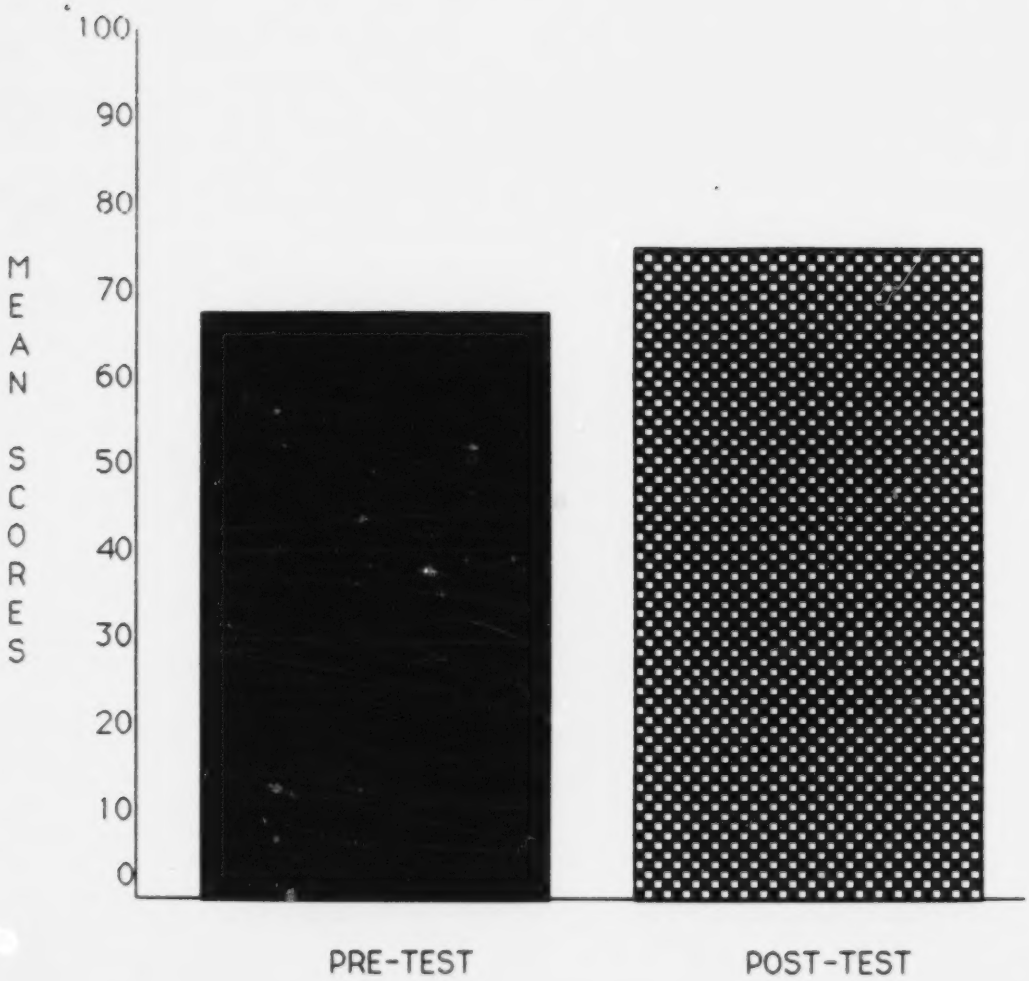

FIGURE 1. Mean pre- and post-test scores of juvenile delinquents on the Estes Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Reading.

and then upon exiting the cottage to the community the scale was re-administered. The data presented in Figure 1. was compiled by adding the pre-post composite scores for all 60 youth and then deriving a single mean for pre and post conditions separately. Figure 1. depicts a modest improvement in attitude towards reading from a pre-test mean of 68 to a post-test mean of 73. It is important to note that the range of composite scores were from a low of 55 on the pre-test to a high 96 on the post-test. However, most of the scores clustered within the 60 to 70 range on the pre-test and 70 to 80 on the post-test. It should also be noted that only eight (8) youth within the entire population of 60 did not report an improved attitute towards reading as measured by the Estes Scale. Moreover, within this population of these eight (8) youth the average decline in attitude averaged only one (1) to two (2) points on the scale.

Figure 2. provides a graphic display of the the number of disciplinary reports students received during a six (6) month period prior to implementation and then throught the eight (8) month implementation phase of the practicum. The date indicate that there was a dramatic and sustained reduction in the number of

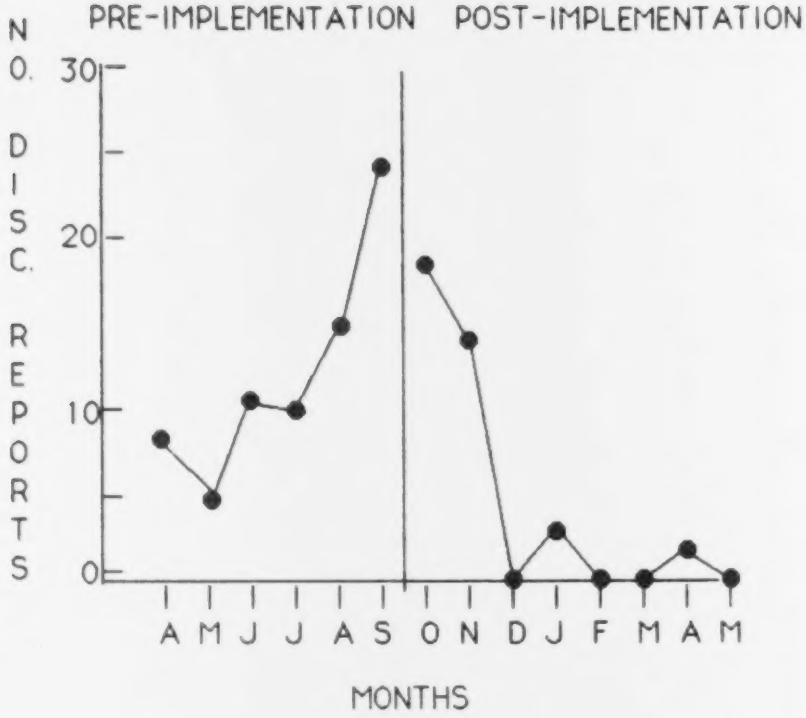

Figure 2. Number of student disciplinary reports filed by staff during the months of April, 1990, through May, 1991 as a function of pre- and post-implementation phases.

disciplinary reports filed during the implementation phase as opposed to before implmentation. During the six (6) month period prior to implementation there were 74 disciplinary reports filed while after implementation and during an eight (8) month period there were only 38 reports filed. This change represents a reduction of greater than 50 percent and as clearly depicted in Figure 2. ,the reduction is substantial and persistent during the last six (6) months of the implementation phase.

Anecodotal reports regarding the increase in youth time spent reading and writing is well documented. All staff without exception report that youth were observed reading and writing substantially more during the implementation phase of the practicum. Moreover, all staff report that the incidences of voluntary reading has increased markedly following implementation of the practicum. A comprehensive analysis of these narrative data follows below under the discussion section of this report.

Conclusions

Beginning with the implementation phase of this practium the cottage was literally inundated with reading material. Paperback

books and current popular magazines were placed througout the cottage and students were directed to beginning utilizing these materials. The immediate effect on the cottage life was dramatic and was so noted by the staff. Youngsters began picking up the material and were observed to be reading the materials during any free-time available between activites . This was noteworthy, since it was during this down-time that youth frequently engaged in verbal and physical altercations. However, during the implementation phase this time appeared to be spent in the more productive activity of reading a magazine or book. This finding seems to corroborate the findings of Fader and McNeil (1968), whose work served as a driving force for the methods employed in this study.

The data as presented in Figure 1. indicate that almost all youth showed an improved attitude towards reading following the implementation of this practicum. Although the average improvement in scores was moderate between pre and post tests, the practical signficance of the change appears to have been dramatic. In other words, the narrative or ethnographic data provides substantial support for the notion that a major change in

attitude towards reading occurred in this population of youth. Staff report that virtually all youth demonstrated a greater interest and appreciation for written material during the implementation phase of the practicum. Youth were frequently noted to ask when the next issue of several of the magazines would arrive so they could be the first to read the publication. Almost all youth were observed to take reading material to their rooms prior to "lights out" and were observed to have developed a habit of reading magazines or books just before going to sleep. The staff reported that bed-time disturbances were greatly reduced as a result of this practice by the youth. Consequently, what may appear to be only a modest improvement in attitude as measured by the Estes Scale may in fact translate into a substantial practical improvement in the lives of these delinquent youth. It should be noted as well that the Estes Scale has rather high face validity and therefore may promote students answering the questions on the pre-test in a socially desirable manner. If this process were operative, you would expect only moderate gains when pre and post-test scores were compared. This may account for the small improvements as measured by the scale in comparison to the narrative data reports.

The staff reported that the frequency of student writing also increased during the implementation phase. Students were asked to do "process" writing which could be shared with the groups when they convened. Many students came well prepared to the groups with their written work and were proud to share their ideas with others. While the writing skills of many youngsters remained unsophisticated and concrete, this was the first time that many of these youth had committed their ideas to written form as a means of communicating with others. As a result, there appeared to be an increase in the number of letters the youth wrote to family and friends. As one would expect, it appeared that the number of letters youth received in return also increased. Some of the more advanced readers read a sampling of the classics, e.g. Huckleberry Finn, and wrote book reports describing their impressions of the work. The report on Huckleberry Finn prompted a rather poignant discussion within the group regarding slavery and contemporary issues related to racial inequality.

The quantitative data showed a substantial reduction in the number of disciplinary reports students received during the

implementation phase as compared to the previous six (6) months. While it is not possible to ascribe a functional relationship between the methods utilized in this practicum and the reduction in disciplinary reports, the effects of implementing this practicum surely contributed to this saltatory affect. As reported above, altercations between students were reduced during "down time" and problems in settling youth for the night were reduced. Since these were predominantly the times when most disciplinary reports occurred, it appears that the implementation of this practicum had a substantial affect in reducing the number of disciplinary actions.

During several months of the implementation phase of this practicum the world and the media were pre-occupied with the events occurring in the Persian Gulf. The youngsters who participated in this practicum were no exception and therefore the periodic materials they received took on increased value. The youth seemed to spend considerable time reading and reviewing the written and pictorial information provided in their newly acquired news magazines. The staff attempted to capitalize on this unique set of circumstances by conducting reading/discussion groups pertaining directly to the war. Youth who were actively reading

periodic materials were the most informed and knowledgeable about the recent happenings in the Gulf. Consequently, several youth began making it a habit to read the magazines so they would not be the least informed during the discussions and could add to the discussions. The unique circumstances provided by the Persian Gulf War may have actually strengthened the connection between reading and deriving important and useful information from the printed word for this population of youth. The benefits of the whole language approach to reading instruction were clearly enhanced by the attention the media gave to the Persian Gulf War. Moreover, the coincidence between implementation of this practicum the Gulf War only serves to underscore the enormous instructional power and value of this approach to teaching reading. Had this practicum adopted a traditional methodology towards reading this unique and rich opportunity to teach the functional value of reading to delinquent youth would have been missed.

One of the more dramatic spin-offs of this practicum has been the easing of racial tensions within the cottage. As in most correctional institutions racial tensions run high and the residents tend to socially segregate themselves along racial lines. During

several of the discussion/reading groups youngsters have been observed to help a less proficient reader of a different race. This type of assistance is not typically offered and when it is, it is usually not well received. However, in every instance of this occurrence in the reading groups the assistance has been well received and seems to have increased the level of socialization among the youth residing in the cottage. While there has not been a documented change in socialization across racial lines in areas other than the reading groups, it appears that this practicum has provided a foundation for enhancing this much needed effort.

During the course of the implementation of this practicum the cottage manager was in the process of re-defining the mission of his cottage as a transition program. He was impressed with the benefits of the reading program to the extent that he incorporated it into his program design recommendations. His recommendations were recently acted upon by the administrative team and he received full support and funding to continue the program beyond the eight (8) month implementation phase of this work. Moreover, the superintendent of the institution who is a voracious reader himself, has become very interested in the practicum and has recommended

that other cottages adopt similar methods as they develop their programs. Throughout the course of this practicum the superintendent has been one of the more active "donators" of reading material for the youth in Phoenix cottage.

In addition to supplying the cottage with donated paperbacks, each youth has applied for and receive a library card to be used at the local public library. For many youth, this was their first experience visiting a library and checking out materials. While there is no guarantee that the youth will continue this practice once released from the institution this practicum has provided an opportunity to learn the benefits of holding a library card.

In summary, it appears that the objectives of this practicum were met and several unanticipated outcomes may have increased the overall value of this project. Youth demonstrated a modest improvement in their attitudes towards reading on the Estes Scale while a subastantial reduction in number of disciplinary reports occurred. The narrative data provided insight into the practical significance of the moderate quantitative gains. Ethnographic data suggests that most students developed substantially improved attitudes towards reading as measured by an increase in time they

spent reading and writing. It appears that the changes in reading habits have some likelihood of transferring to other situations and over time especially when the fact that the Persian Gulf War occurred in the midst of implementation and bolstered the connection between reading and its functional value. The unanticipated outcomes occurred mostly in the social domain for the youths in this cottage. The methods of this practicum provided a forum for inter-racial cooperation which was not observed in any form prior to implementation. It appears that several youth may have learned that racial differences do not have to present a barrier to cooperation.

Recommendations

Persons interested in teaching reading to delinquent youth should recognize the fact that this practicum demonstrates that all learning does not occur in classrooms and only under the tutelage of teachers. This writer recommends that others, when presented with a similar problem, utilize the skills and abilities of para-professional staff to supplement the instruction of classroom teachers. The skill and enthusiasm of this level of staff should not

be underestimated or taken for granted. As discussed above, the Phoenix cottage program has already adopted the methods of this practicum into its program design. The superintendent has indicated that he will be promoting similar projects in all of the other cottages.

Dissemination

This writer plans to disseminate this practicum through co-authorship with the practicum advisor. Manuscripts will be submitted to at least two professional journals: The Child and Youth Care Administrator and Correctional Education. In addition, this writer has been recently requested by the Mayflower Corporation to write the educational program design component of a proposal to privatize the operation of the Hickey Training School in Maryland. A substantial component of the program design will include the methods utilized in this practicum and will reference this practicum report and Nova University. Finally, the writer is presently providing consultation services to several states in the re-development of their correctional facilities which have come under attack by the American Civil Liberties Union. The methods utilized

in this practicum will be recommended as remedies and will be referenced to this practicum report and Nova University. One case in particular, in Delaware, places this writer in direct contact with the governor's office and consequently increases the scope of the dissemination of this practicum.

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APPENDIX A

WHOLE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE
SKILL CHECKLIST

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The cottage counselor is capable of performing the following throughout the day and during reading/discussion groups:

1. Directs the youth to available reading materials suited to his interests and functioning.

2. Makes available time and encourages each youth to complete a daily journal on any topic of his choosing.

3. Encourages youth to share writing with others including other youths and counselors.

4. Arranges a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere for the evening reading/discussion groups.

5. Models reading behavior by reading stories or poetry aloud each day.

6. Encourages youth to come prepared to the group to read materials which interest him or others.

7. Focuses on the function of reading and writing as opposed to the mechanics.

8. Encourages youth's progressive development of reading and writing skills.

9. Encourages questions and lively discussion during group experiences.

10. Encourages youth to "take risks" in their reading and writing opportunities.